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The West for the Union, now and forever.

SPEECH

OF

HON. JNO. A. GURLEY, OF OHIO,

ON

THE STATE OF THE UNION,

DELIVERED IN

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, JANUARY 16TH, 1861.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the Army Appropriation Bill—

Mr. GURLEY rose and said :

Mr. CHAIRMAN : Coming as I do, from the most populous free State city in the West, whose commercial and moneyed interests are more strongly and generally interwoven with the interests of the South than any other; a city which casts nearly five thousand more votes than any in the valley of the Mississippi, I must regard it as a duty which I owe to my constituents to indicate in a few words to this body and the country, what are their views and intentions in reference to the present crisis in our political affairs.

Sir, for nearly a quarter of a century I have lived upon the very line of freedom and slavery, in or near a city from whence you can almost toss a stone to the Kentucky shore; and I must therefore believe that I have a fair knowledge of, not only the political opinions of my own neighborhood, but of the nine or ten million people west of the Alleghany mountains. And here, in passing, I will take the liberty to say that, during the whole period of my residence in the West, the inhabitants of Kentucky and Ohio, in the neighborhood of Cincinnati, have lived together in the most friendly intercourse; and, come what may, we mean that this state of things shall continue. Many of our young men have been so fortunate as to become the husbands of the fair daughters of Kentucky, while many of our young ladies have made the hearts of Kentuckians more than thrice glad by consenting to become their brides; and if gentlemen here could only see the extraordinarily fine broods of rosy-cheeked and healthy children which we raise upon either side of the river from these happy unions, they would be at no loss to realize the bond of friendship that unites us together; nor could they wonder at the remarkable increase of population in our fertile valley.

Indeed, sir, truth compels me to say that such is the good understanding of the people in all that region, that if our citizens were to hear of a slave insurrection on the opposite side of the river—of which, I am happy to say, there is

no fear—endangering the lives of the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of that State, they would fly to their relief as they would to the rescue of the inmates of a burning building in our own city.

And what more signal evidence of the fraternal feeling between the people of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio could be given than that furnished by the meeting of the legislators of those States last winter at Columbus, the capitol of my own State, where they addressed each other in words of warmest friendship? Surely if any political heresy existed in our State it must have been quite as apparent then as now. But there was none against which the lawmakers of Kentucky and Tennessee protested. They met and rejoiced together like brothers dwelling together in unity.

Mr. Chairman, from the location of my country, it might be supposed that its people are among the most conservative of the free States; but whether they are so or not, one thing I do know: they are for the Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the laws, at all hazards, and at any cost. At the same time, we are for rendering justice to all sections of the Confederacy. We are for the faithful execution of all laws upon the national statute-book, and not for infringing upon a single right of the southern people. Who does not know that their rights are as sacred to them as ours to us? And as to the subject of slavery, as it exists by State laws, they have it. It is a business that belongs exclusively to them, not to us; let them take care of it in their own way; hands off! That is all we ask.

But, sir, while affirming these facts, I must frankly add some remarks on another subject of great moment and peril, in reference to which we are almost a unit. I refer, Mr. Chairman, to the now boldly preached doctrine of State secession—a doctrine so absurd to our minds that we are of the opinion that it is a waste of time to seriously consider it. What is it? Why, sir, it is the wildest, the very wildest, phantasy of the nineteenth century. Who does not know that if one State can go out of the Union, so can two, or three, or half a dozen, until we find ourselves with twenty or thirty petty sovereignties, with clashing interests, and waging each against the other a horrible internecine warfare?

To say that our fathers contemplated any such secession, with its necessary fruits of blood and carnarge, is to cast the foulest slander upon their memories.

It is sufficient for us to know that we live under the very Government which their wisdom and sagacity founded; the best and freest in the world. That it was established, not by States as States, but by the people of all the States. By them the Constitution was framed; and by them it was ratified, in conventions called for that purpose. It is enough to know that it is recognized by the whole world as one of the great political Powers of the earth; and that, as such, it contains all the elements of self-preservation. It is a Government of internal as well as external power; of law, of justice, of order, and supreme authority. It has the undisputed right to declare war, to make peace, and to do all things that a great nation may do in order to secure the peace and the happiness of its citizens. It has the right to defend itself against foes, whether they come from without or from within its borders; from traitors at home, and enemies abroad. Otherwise, sir, that glorious flag which now floats over our heads, and regarded as the emblem of power everywhere, and the shield of our safety, would soon trail with dishonor in the dust. Who says that such a Government, one of the strongest political Powers of the world, shall be disrupted by traitors and rebels in arms?

Remember, ye who now seek its destruction, that it has stood up strongly,

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proudly, gloriously, for more than seventy years, while the revolutions of the Old World have swept away more than a dozen thrones. It has encountered the perils of war with a powerful foreign nation, and several times grappled with rebellion at home, and in every conflict has come off more than victorious; and it will do it now.

Much has been said about compromises in both Houses; but pray, what care the men who have carried their States out of the Union in *their* way, and stolen United States property, about compromises? Who does not know that they laugh and mock at the attempts made here and elsewhere to bring them back by some bargain or compromise? Who does not know that the controlling men of the cotton States spurn, and are ready to spit upon, every proposition looking to the restoration of peace and good order? They are too mad with rage to reason.

Sir, they have already seized upon our forts, upon our armories, our custom-houses, our post offices, and magazines; and to crown all, have fired into a vessel in the service of the United States, carrying at its mast-head the flag that everywhere else is a shield of protection. What else do we hear? The telegraph tells us that they have planted cannon upon the banks of the Mississippi river to interrupt the navigation of that river; to stop our steamboats or blow them to pieces. They insult the men from the Northwest who trade upon the Mississippi; indeed, they treat them as a conquered people! Our most honored merchants are ordered home from Louisiana, and our most prudent business men are maltreated for no other crime under heaven than that of voting just as every free citizen of a free republic is entitled to vote. Anarchy reigns in portions of the South; and men from the free States have far less liberty than they would have under any despotic Government of Europe. Sir, we have had one impressive illustration of this fact this morning in this House. A gentleman came forward, and asked that the name of a steamboat should be changed from that of John C. Fremont to some other name. Why was that? Why did the owner of that boat come here, and ask for the change? I will tell you, because I had it from his own lips. He said he could not go to the South with that boat; that the people there would not permit him to land; that they would not permit him to put ashore his cargo; that they said "away," upon peril of his life. And this, in the freest Republic of the world, as you call it; ay, sir, the model Republic of the world. The next thing you will hear will be that we must change our names, if offensive to the South, before we can travel there.

Sir, it is time to stop the work of these traitors, and vindicate the laws. They must prevail, or the Government must put them down by its own strong arm. The trial cannot come too soon. Forbearance towards them has ceased to be a virtue. The people are everywhere asking, "Have we a Government?" I say, if we have, that the coming struggle to maintain it will demonstrate that it is a Government of power and overwhelming force, against the offenders of the law. If, however, we have nothing more than a sort of mutual admiration society in this House, and in the other, it is time the people understood that fact also. It is better for them to understand that now. If there is any truth in the doctrine of the secessionists, our Government never had any vital power; and it is, and ever has been, as they expound it, the merest rope of sand—a cheat and a swindle against those who have hitherto sustained it.

The people have been spending millions of money every year under the delusive idea that Congress was making laws that they actually meant should be obeyed; and, at this late day, they awake to the reality that those laws were only submitted to the consideration of offenders to see whether they would like to obey them.

We see treason and cold-blooded rebellion culminating in the destruction of the rights of the law-abiding people of the land: but we are coolly told that the Army and Navy must not molest them. Why? Lest they should become offended, and then possibly somebody might be hurt. Awful! It is said, too, that if you attempt to execute the laws, war will be the result. My answer is this: we are to perform our duty, our own duty, and leave the result to God. We propose no war against anybody, much less against any State. We only ask that the laws be duly executed against individual offenders.

Who is not opposed to war? Who does not shudder at the contemplation of clashing arms among a people of one blood and country? But bad as it is, there are some things even worse than war, when carried on by a well-established Government. Anarchy is worse The loss of honor, and the loss of public credit, and a broken and shattered Government, whose laws are derided and trampled under foot: these are worse than war to maintain the most favored and glorious and blessed Republic that the sun ever shone upon.

But no war will come if we are prepared to vindicate the laws. It is the very absence of preparation that invites troubles like those which now surround us. Let the Government act with firmness and vigor, and all will be well. The present is no time for temporizing. Men insane with passion have risen up in arms against the Republic, and their causeless rebellion has already attracted the eye of the civilized world, and the leading Governments of Europe are looking from their high places intently upon us, to see if our institutions can survive the shock of well-organized treason. Liberty-loving men of all countries are watching us with the interest that more than seventy years of successful experiment has inspired in their minds; and for the action which we now take, civilization as well as history itself will hold us sternly responsible. Sir, we are now on trial before the whole world, to see whether freemen have the right to choose their own rulers, or whether a factious minority shall dictate terms and men to the majority.

If those in arms against the laws may force the Government into dishonorable compromise, we have no security for our Government for a single presidential term; for the people of any section, if they happen to dislike the President elect, can easily vote themselves out of the Union, and again and again compel the law-making and the law-executing power to surrender to their absurd and unjust demands. The precedent once established, what is the elective franchise in this country worth? Absolutely nothing, and less than nothing. It is the shadow without the substance.

Those who stand up against the Government, and in open rebellion against it, although it secures to them higher privileges than any upon the face of the earth, seek to excite sympathy and attract support, by drawing a comparison between their political condition under it, and that of the colonists under the King of England; but a more absurd comparison, in my judgment, was never instituted, as we will show.

Mr. JENKINS. Will the gentleman allow me to ask him a question, for the purpose of understanding him? The gentleman speaks of enforcing the laws and collecting the revenue at any extreme and at all hazards. Now, suppose fifteen States of this Union should secede, and confederate under a common government: would the gentleman advocate a subjection of them to submission? Would he insist upon the enforcement of the laws, as he calls it, or would he recognize them as a government *de facto?*

Mr. GURLEY. I might say, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The principle is the same, whether applied to one State or fifteen. I am for executing the laws.

Mr. JENKINS. I ask the gentleman, if twenty States should secede and confederate together, whether he would propose that the other thirteen should subjugate them?

Mr. GURLEY. When they go out, I will answer that question.

I was saying that those who stand up now in open rebellion against the Government, do so although it secures to them higher privileges than would be secured to them by any other government upon the face of the earth; and that they are exciting sympathy by drawing comparisons between their political condition under it and the colonists under the King of England. But, I ask, did the colonists create the King? Did they set up the throne? Did they elect the Parliament? Did they even elect and control their own Governors? Nay, sir, the very acts which they passed, with the exception of some colonies, had to receive the sanction of the English sovereign before they became law. A foreign despotism held undisputed sway over them.

Now, sir, let gentlemen who complain of oppression in the light of complaints uttered by our fathers against English rule, tell us who established the Government under which we live. Did it come from a foreign despot? from a king? from an emperor? It came from your fathers and mine. Who but the patriots of the revolutionary times gave us the glorious institutions which have been the pride and admiration of all wise and good men? And now, who carry on this Government? The people of all the States, who elect the Chief Magistrate; the people, who create the laws; the people, by their sovereignty and representatives. And yet gentlemen of the South assure us that they are oppressed. Oppressed! Oppressed! How oppressed, and by whom? If at all, by the Government which they themselves have helped to create, and have controlled, as they openly boast, for fifty years. It is their Government; and what do they propose to do now? Trample upon the very laws they have made with their own brains and with their own hands. They assume to lay violent hands upon their own work, and commit political suicide. They will overturn the Government because it is not certain that they can control it in the future as they have controlled it in the past. And this is called consistency; this is called a declaration of their independence. Sir, I call it the independence of treason and rebellion; and that treason is to be punished in a way specified by statute of the United States. I will ask that one passage be read upon that subject.

The Clerk read, as follows:

"If any citizen shall commit any piracy or robbery aforesaid, or any act of hostility against the United States, or any citizen thereof, upon the high seas, under color of any commission from any foreign Prince or State, or on pretence of authority from any person, such offender shall, notwithstanding the pretence of any such authority, be deemed, adjudged, and taken to be a pirate, felon, and robber; and on being thereof convicted, shall suffer death."—*Statutes at Large*, vol. 1, p. 113.

Mr. GURLEY. Mr. Chairman, my own State contains a larger white population than five southern States which I can name; and we have two Senators and they have ten! But with all this inequality in favor of the South, they come to us and demand new guarantees of fidelity to their peculiar institution, if not positive pledges of servility on the part of the free States. They go further, sir, and actually ask that our people walk up to the polls and record the edicts of a few hundred men at Charleston or Baltimore. And if we refuse to do that, what do they say? What have they said in this House? They will pull down the pillars of this great Republic, and "look to their guns for justice and right." The moment we dare to cast our votes as freemen should, and select the man of our deliberate choice for President, in correspondence with the Con-

stitution and the laws of the land, we commit an unpardonable sin, and there is an end to free government. On this principle, we can have no higher political privileges than the people of Austria or Russia. We are required to become the obedient servants of a cottonocracy, and sink the freemen in a craven political dependent.

I maintain, sir, that there is no excuse, no apology whatever, for rebellion against a Government where the people themselves make and control it. Violent revolutions are justifiable against kingly despotism, without doubt; but not against our Government, where each man is himself a ruler. Revolution against that is a high crime. It is a leap in the dark. It is wild anarchy; and, if successful, must end in military rule, in general war, and general oppression. If we fail to preserve the present Confederacy, a reconstruction upon the basis that will be demanded is impossible; and twelve months will not pass from the time of its overthrow before we shall have upon us all the horrors of Mexican warfare.

This great Union and Constitution are now in the keeping of the people's servants here, and they have the control of the Army and the Navy. Let them guard the former well; for if by any means they perish in their hands, the great historian of nations will write them down as the most feeble, pusillanimous cowards that ever disgraced a free country.

But, sir, let us look at some of the results of breaking up our Government. If States may separate at will, where is your public faith? What better are your treaties than the naked parchment upon which they are written? Who then will become the purchasers of your bonds? In what condition will be your widow and orphan and benevolent societies that have placed their all in the public credit? What man would trust a people for one dollar who would tamely permit traitors to insult their flag and steal their property with impunity? One thing is certain: if the organized Government here does not vindicate its honor and resent it wrongs, and anarchy comes, the people of the free States will do that work most thoroughly.

Mr. Chairman, so long as gentlemen confine themselves to the harmless business of dissolving this Union upon paper, and setting up in their poetical imaginations a Government antagonistic to that of the United States, I certainly have no disposition to break in upon their dreams of wealth and glory consequent upon the new order of things; but if the attempt is to be made to make these mere dreams the basis of action against our great temple of republican freedom, reared by patriotic hands and minds; if indeed they should take a practical form, and result in the actual invasion of the rights of our General Government as illustrated in the conduct of those who have recently seized upon its property in the South, then, sir, I am for using every means which Almighty God has given us to maintain the laws, the Constitution, and the Union. This, sir, I am sure is the sentiment of the ten million people living in the West and Northwest, with here and there an exception; and I would now most respectfully suggest to the secessionists of the South and to all who are disposed to break up this great and glorious Confederacy, that it would be at least an act of prudence to consult those ten million. They are now a power in the nation to the extent of one-third; and they mean to be heard, and if need be felt, on this impending question. I will not say that no traitors will be found in the free States west of the Alleghany mountains; but if any, they will be as one to twenty tories in the Revolution. And now, sir, is their a single man so beside himself as to suppose that these ten million hardy people will look calmly on or take a neutral position, and see State after State leave the Union, and the Mississippi river pass into the control of a

foreign Government? I deny it. No, sir; they settled up that country with a clear understanding that that river and its various tributaries should forever flow in the United States of America, free for a commerce that already rivals that of the Atlantic coast—the great unobstructed highway to the ocean. Heaven have mercy upon the men who attempt to make it anything else, or place a single disability upon its trade or commerce.

I know the spirit and the temper of the people of the West, and I know also that they never will submit to the Mississippi river being controlled by any power except that of the Union. Sir, there is a gathering storm in the West. The South may not see, and if they see, may not heed it; but a mighty storm is coming nevertheless. Our people are slow to anger, and will bear much before they strike down the invaders of their rights; but there is a point of endurance beyond which they will not go.

This work of driving our people from territory where they have guarantied rights as American citizens; this work of planting cannon upon the Mississippi river for treasonable purposes; this work of personal violence in New Orleans and other places, all must cease, or tens of thousands of men will rush to the combat and sweep the entire coast of Mississippi and Louisiana; and, their just indignation once fairly aroused, no power this side of Heaven can prevent them from making the foundation of New Orleans the bed of a lake where fishes will dwell instead of men.

I now wish to call the attention of the committee to some outrages committed on the commerce of the Mississippi river. I ask to have a short extract read.

The Clerk read from the Chicago Tribune of 14th instant, as follows:

"A few days since one of our heaviest wholesale grocery firms, doing a large business with the city of New Orleans, had occasion to send a large shipment of flour to that city. This they proposed to do in their usual form of insurance—an open policy. But at the last moment comes the intelligence by telegraph that the New York insurers have *canceled the policy*, and refuse to insure cargoes on the Mississippi river. The firm have sent their flour to New York for ocean freight to New Orleans.

"Simultaneously with the above, the wholesale grocery houses are advised by our Chicago underwriters, that they must largely advance rates of insurance on shipments of sugar from New Orleans, a rate which will tell heavily against the advantages of New Orleans as a sugar market, and, with the reasons for this change, will do much to divert trade to the seaboard. Now, all this is the result of the action of the seceding State of Mississippi, which gives three hundred miles of a doubtful, perhaps hostile, coast, to be added to the risks of river navigation: no slight addition to be sure; for who believes that the traitors who are arming Mississippi against the Union would stick at supplying a scanty commissariat by a seizure of northern produce? Underwriters and capitalists do not consult political demagogues as to their business interests. Capital is quick to take alarm, and is most sagacious. Thus, by a single blow at the hand of traitors, Chicago and New Orleans are put wide asunder by the interposed foreign State of Mississippi."

Mr. MAYNARD. I should like to ask the gentleman from Ohio, if this occurs in the present state of affairs, what would it be when the Union is dissolved and the Government broken up? "If this thing be done in the green tree, what will not be done in the dry?"

Mr. GURLEY. If the Union be broken up, and war follow, let the consequences fall on those who are responsible. Do southern gentlemen expect that the people of the far West will fold their hands in indifference, and see their commerce interrupted, their steamboats fired into? How long do they expect us to submit to it? Sir, no foreign Government on the face of the earth could commit such outrages against this nation without an immediate declaration of war. And now I say, that with strong hands and stout hearts our people settled

up the West. With their own right arm they leveled the forest, and prepared the land for themselves and their children. The very hardships they have endured make them strong and brave; and woe to those who attempt by force to take from them a single right which they possess upon any river that flows toward the sea.

In conclusion, sir, I will say that I am for practical and speedy legislation to meet the exigencies of the times. Give us a bill permitting the President to receive volunteers to sustain the national Government. Pass it; let it become a law at once; and if you need fifty thousand soldiers from the West you will have them; a hundred thousand, and you will have them. And then, if the worst comes to the worst, and the stars and stripes are still in danger, ask for five hundred thousand, and they will be at your command. Do any call this an extravagant statement? Sir, we have in Ohio alone nearly three hundred thousand able-bodied men who are subject to military duty by our laws. They will defend the Union; they will defend the Government; they will defend the Capitol; and they will defend our glorious flag as long as they have a loaf of bread to eat or a gun to fire.

Peace and harmony we all desire; but we will never purchase them with dishonor and the surrender of self-respect. Those who make war upon the Government without any just cause must bear the responsibility and punishment which belong to rebels and traitors.

It has been supposed that the people of the West are divided in sentiment on this subject, and that a large number of them side with those who are now seeking to destroy the Government. This, however, will be found to be a great mistake. The resolutions of the Legislature of Ohio, as read from the clerk's desk this morning, show that the people of Ohio are all but unanimous on the subject of maintaining the Government. These resolutions passed the Senate unanimously, by the votes of both Democrats and Republicans. Sir, when the question comes up of fidelity to this Union, and when the Government is in danger, we of the West will never stop to talk about names. We will overleap all party lines. We will, if need be, sink all party names

"Deeper than did plummet ever sound."

We will come in solid phalanx. We will rally as one man to defend the Union and maintain our glorious flag, which gives protection to our citizens in all lands. It now floats proudly, triumphantly over this Capitol, and it shall never be struck down by rebels at home or enemies abroad.

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